



After the shakes... increasing the stakes: Making sense of complexity by intentionally connecting service, learning, and critical reflection as an events-based pedagogy

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Keywords: Alternative service-learning model, atypical service-learning course, case study, earthquakes, New Zealand

Conference track: Higher education student outcomes

Format: Research/Scholarly paper

Summary

Service-learning in higher education is fundamentally about facilitating connections among service, learning, teaching, and reflection to create a powerful and engaging pedagogy. Inherent in that is also connecting students, faculty, staff, and the community for mutual benefit. In 2010 and 2011, a series of earthquakes destroyed the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, and a resulting example of mutually beneficial community service at the University of Canterbury (UC) emerged.

Over 9,000 UC students organized themselves as the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) to provide immediate post-quake relief, and this served as a catalyst for the creation of a service-learning course, CHCH101: Rebuilding Christchurch, at UC (O'Steen & Perry, 2012). The philosophical (Dewey, 1933/1989), theoretical (Kolb, 1984), and practical (Eyler & Giles, 1999) values of intentionally connecting service and learning is well established, as is the idea that reflection is the primary bonding agent for the two actions of serving and learning (Sigmon, 1996).

What might be an alternative model for service-learning when the service has been completed prior to the course? Further, what would the emphasis of such a course be, and would the course achieve similar outcomes as the typical design, particularly with regard to critical reflection? On these questions, the literature is lacking, and our case study of an atypical service-learning course, CHCH101, provides a contribution.

It is our contention that the design of this course, which allowed for significant focus on critical reflection because the service had already occurred, was the main contributor to students' improvement of their critical reflection skills.

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